



STATE OF MICHIGAN

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Past Workers At Dearborn Plant Were Exposed To Hazardous Asbestos Levels

Workers at the former W. R. Grace & Company vermiculite exfoliation plant in Dearborn – from the early 1950s to 1990 – were exposed to hazardous levels of asbestos, according to a public health consultation from the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) and the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR).

Until 1990, the former W.R. Grace facility processed vermiculite – mined in Libby, Montana – that contained asbestos. ATSDR has linked some past exposures to Libby vermiculite to respiratory illnesses.

The consultation also indicated that those who lived with former W.R. Grace workers while Libby vermiculite was being processed at the plant also were exposed to asbestos. Workers may have carried home asbestos fibers on their hair and clothing, but the degree to which household members may have been exposed cannot be conclusively determined, according to MDCH officials.

MDCH and ATSDR found no indication that current workers on the property – employed by a tool and die shop – are being exposed to hazardous levels of asbestos. Some soil samples from the site, taken by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), show concentrations of asbestos at very low levels. Other samples failed to detect asbestos.

Officials also suspect that some former workers and residents took asbestos-contaminated waste rock home from the plant and used it around their homes (for example, for driveway and garden filler). People could still be exposed to small amounts of this asbestos today if any waste rock remains exposed and is disturbed (by foot or vehicle traffic, for example).

MDCH and ATSDR recommends that former workers and the household members who lived with them learn more about asbestos and see a doctor with expertise in asbestos-related lung diseases. “MDCH can help you learn more as well as provide assistance in locating such medical expertise,” said Erik R. Janus, toxicologist for the MDCH Bureau of Epidemiology.

The former W.R. Grace plant health consultation was done in cooperation with ATSDR and is part of that agency’s National Asbestos Exposure Review (NAER). Under the program, more than 200 sites around the United States that received vermiculite ore mined in Libby from the early 1920s until 1990 are being evaluated. More information about NAER is available online at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/naer/index.html>.

MORE

The ATSDR/MDCH public health consultation is available for review at the Dearborn Public Library (16301 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn) **or** the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (6450 Maple Street, Dearborn). It also is available on-line at <http://www.michigan.gov/mdch-toxics/> **or** <http://www.atsdr.gov/naer/dearbornmi>.

MDCH welcomes comments and information from community members about the health consultation and the site contamination. Questions and MDCH's responses will be published later in a separate document. A public availability session in Dearborn will be held in the near future with members of the MDCH, ATSDR and EPA present. The primary purpose of this meeting is to field questions, comments, and concerns regarding both the document and potential exposure to asbestos-contaminated vermiculite. Questions on the health consultation document must be submitted in writing to:

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For more information, community members may contact Erik Janus with the Michigan Department of Community Health, Bureau of Epidemiology toll-free at 800-648-6942, or via electronic mail at januse@michigan.gov.

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